

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

The Book of Shmuel Yeshivat Har Etzion

LECTURE 17: CHAPTER 10 (PART I)

THE SIGNS GIVEN TO SHAUL

Rav Amnon Bazak

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGNS

After anointing Shaul with the cruse of oil,^{1[1]} Shemuel sends him off, informing him of various incidents that will take place on his way:

When you are departed from me today, then you shall find two men by the tomb of Rachel, in the border of Binyamin at Tzeltzach; and they will say to you: The donkeys which you went to seek are found; and, lo, your father has left off caring for the donkeys, and is anxious concerning you, saying: What shall I do for my son? Then shall you go on forward from there, and you shall come to the terebinth of Tabor, and there shall meet you there three men going up to God to Bet-El, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine. And they will salute you, and give you two cakes of bread; which you shall receive of their hand. After that you shall come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Pelishtim; and it shall come to pass, when you have come there to the city, that you shall meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a timbrel, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they will be prophesying. And the spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy with them, and shall be turned into another man. (2-6)

The three signs demonstrate external and substantive development. Externally, the first sign involves two people, the second sign involves three people, and the third sign involves a band of prophets, in the framework of which mention is made of four musical instruments – "a psaltery, a timbrel, a pipe, and a harp." Not just the number, but also the

^{1[1]} *Chazal* noted the symbolism of Shaul's being anointed with "a cruse of oil," rather than a horn: "Shaul and Yehu (II *Melakhim* 9:1) were anointed with a cruse because their kingdom would be broken; David (I *Shemuel* 16:13) and Shelomo (I *Melakhim* 1:39) were anointed with a horn because their kingdom would be everlasting" (Tosefta, *Sanhedrin* 4:11).

status of the people involved rises from sign to sign. The first sign speaks of ordinary people; the second sign speaks of people at a certain spiritual level, who are on their way to bring offerings to God; and the third sign already speaks of prophets. Substantively, there is development in the contact that Shaul has with the various people. In the first sign, they talk to him; in the second sign they give him two cakes of bread; and in the third sign, he joins the band of prophets. The implication is that the signs present themselves to Shaul in a gradually ascending manner and symbolize the development in his own standing.

Thus, the signs given to Shaul differ from the signs given to Moshe (*Shemot* 4:1-9) or to Gidon (*Shofetim* 6:17-23). In those two cases, a person who had been designated for a certain position expresses a lack of confidence in his having been chosen, and the signs are primarily intended to strengthen and encourage him. Shaul, on the other hand, does not ask for anything. Thus, the signs are meant to strengthen Shaul, but their conceptual significance may be understood as part of the lessons that Shemuel wishes to teach through them. It should be noted that the signs given to Shaul did not involve a deviation from nature, except, of course, for the very prediction of what would happen in the future.^{2[2]}

Let us now examine the signs one by one. In the first sign, Shaul is sent to the tomb of Rachel^{3[3]} on the border of Binyamin.^{4[4]} This seems to contain a hidden message, which

^{2[2]} Regarding the virtue of keeping deviations from the natural order to a minimum, see *Shabbat* 53b: "Our Rabbis taught: It once happened that his wife died and left a nursing child, and he did not have of what to pay a nursemaid's fee, and a miracle was performed on his behalf, and nipples opened for him like the nipples of a woman, and he nursed his child. Rav Yosef said: Come and see how great this man is, that such a miracle was performed for him! Abaye said to him: On the contrary, how lowly is that man, that the natural order was changed for him."

^{3[3]} The places mentioned in the chapter – Rachel's tomb and Bet-El – are connected to each other in *Bereishit* 35:9: God reveals Himself to Yaakov in Bet-El and promises him that "kings will issue forth from your loins," and Yaakov's next stop is Rachel's tomb. In light of this, it is possible that "Alon Tavor" mentioned here in v. 3 is "Alon Bechut" mentioned there in v. 8, as found "below Bet-El – for Shaul meets people "going up to Bet El." It turns out then that the story in our chapter, regarding the anointing as king of a member of the tribe of Binyamin the son of Rachel, takes place in the very area where God had promised a king, and where Rachel died when she gave birth to Binyamin.

^{4[4]} I will not discuss here the issue of the location of Rachel's tomb. According to the plain sense of our passage, Shemuel is in Rama and directs Shaul southwards toward Giva. Thus, it seems that the words "in the border of Binyamin," refer to the northern border of the tribe. In any event, we are dealing with a place that is much more north than the traditional location of Rachel's Tomb near Bethlehem. The main issue regarding this location is connected to the phrase "*kivrat erez*" appearing in two verses dealing with Rachel's burial: "And they journeyed from Bet-El,; and there was but '*kivrat ha-aretz*' to come to Efrat; and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor" (*Bereishit* 35:16); "And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan on the way, when yet there was but '*kivrat erez*' to come to Efrat: and I buried her there in the way of Efrat; that is Bethlehem" (*ibid.* 48:7). The plain sense of these passages suggest that the term "*kivrat erez*" means a long way, for that accounts for why Yaakov buried Rachel along the way, and did not bring her to

clarifies that Shaul's right, as a member of the tribe of Binyamin, to serve as the first king of Israel, comes also by virtue of the mother of his ancestors – Rachel. At that precise place, he will meet two people who will tell him two things. First, that the donkeys have been found, and thus he will have greater faith in the words of Shemuel, who had already told him: "And as for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, set not your mind on them; for they are found" (9:20). And second, the change that came over Shaul's father, who had begun to worry more about him. The second part of the sign seems to testify to the correctness of Shaul's assumption at the time of the search, when he said to his lad, "Come and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the donkeys, and become anxious concerning us" (ibid. v. 5). It also emphasizes Shaul's modesty: the assumption that at a certain stage Kish would begin to worry more about Shaul than about his donkeys proves that Shaul was familiar with his father's way of thinking; this familiarity should have brought Shaul to say that his father would worry especially about Shaul, as Shemuel says here: "And is anxious concerning you, saying: What shall I do for **my son**?". Against this background, Shaul's refinement is all the more striking, for he says to his lad, "and become anxious concerning **us**," without mentioning any special concern about himself. In this way, Shemuel emphasizes Shaul's modesty, which underlies God's choosing him as king.

The second sign expresses development in society's estimation of Shaul. As stated above, Shaul meets people on their way to offer a sacrifice, and suddenly they present him with some of the food that they are carrying – two cakes of bread. Giving bread expresses recognition of a person's elevated status, as when Malki-Tzedek offered bread to Avraham (*Bereishit* 14:18). This incident stands in contrast with what is reported at the end of the chapter: "But certain worthless fellows said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, **and brought him no present** (v. 27) – implying that giving a present involves recognition of him as king.^{5[5]}

The third sign is different in its very essence from the two previous signs.^{6[6]} Here Shaul undergoes an internal process that affects his personality. Shemuel informs Shaul from the outset that following his encounter with the prophets, "And the spirit of the Lord will

burial in Efrat, that is Bethlehem. This is also the way that Ramban originally understood these verses. After having visited *Eretz Israel* in 1267 and reaching the traditional site of Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, he changed his mind: "This is what I wrote at first, but now that I have merited to come to Jerusalem, praise to the good and beneficent God, I saw with my own eyes that Rachel's Tomb is less than a mile away from Bethlehem" (Ramban, commentary to *Bereishit* 35:16). There is, however, room to discuss this question, and even Chazal had different views regarding the location of Rachel's Tomb – whether it was in the territory of Yehuda or in the territory of Binyamin. See *Encyclopedia Mikra'it*, s.v. *Kever Rachel*.

^{5[5]} See also *Bereishit* 43:11; *Shofetim* 3:15; *Tehillim* 72:10; and elsewhere.

^{6[6]} This difference is also evident in the fact that whereas Scripture does not describe in detail the actual occurrence of the first two signs, and contents itself with the general statement, "And all those signs came to pass that day" (v. 9), the occurrence of the third sign is described in detail (vv. 10-12).

come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy with them, and shall be turned into another man." The spirit of God coming upon Shaul is part of the essence of his kingship, as is stated in the next chapter, in the war fought against Nachash the Amonite: "And the spirit of God came mightily upon Shaul when he heard those words, and his anger was kindled greatly..." (11:6). In reality, however, the change in Shaul transpired even more quickly than foretold by Shemuel.

And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Shemuel, God gave him another heart.... (9)

II. "AND I WILL TELL YOU WHAT YOU SHALL DO."

Shemuel concludes his description of the signs with a positive declaration:

And let it be, when these signs are come unto you, that you do as your hand shall find; for God is with you. (7)

These words imply that Shemuel grants Shaul the full freedom to act in accordance with his own best judgment.^{7[7]} Immediately afterwards, however, he adds the following:

And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto you, to offer burnt-offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace-offerings; seven days shall you tarry, till I come unto you, and tell you what you shall do. (8)

Here already Shemuel alludes to what will take place in chapter 13, prior to the battle waged against the Pelishtim, in the incident that will mark Shaul's first failure, when he violates his instructions and offers the sacrifices before Shemuel arrives. These instructions, however, are strange, for they clearly do not mean that immediately upon fulfillment of the signs, Shaul must proceed to Gilgal and wait for seven days. At this stage, the nation still does not know anything about Shaul, and the events described in chapter 13 must have transpired a considerable amount of time later. Accordingly, Radak writes:

The fact that he said this to him at this time, and did not wait until they were in Gilgal... is because now when he spoke to him of the monarchy, he alluded to him that it will be with this that his kingdom will stand or fall; this is the first commandment that he gave him, and if he fulfills it, the kingdom will be preserved in his hand, and if not, not.

In other words, together with the free hand that he gave Shaul in the previous verse, Shemuel wishes to emphasize – from the very outset – the other side of the coin: Even if you

^{7[7]} Radak: "That is to say, whatever you wish to do, do." See also *Shofetim* 9:33; *Kohelet* 9:10.

turn into a different man, and even if you are granted broad authority, you must still subordinate yourself to my word, that is, to the word of God.

III. "IS SHAUL ALSO AMONG THE PROPHETS?"

The story of the signs ends with two short epilogues. The first tells of the origins of the expression, "Is Shaul also among the prophets?":

And when they came there to the hill, behold, a band of prophets met him; and the spirit of God came mightily upon him, and he prophesied among them. And it came to pass, when all that knew him previously saw that, behold, he prophesied with the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Shaul also among the prophets? And one of the same place answered and said, And who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb: Is Saul also among the prophets? (10-12)

What is the meaning of this story? What is the significance of the expression, and why did Scripture find it necessary to expand at length about its origin? It seems that one cannot understand the story without examining a parallel account, at the time of Shaul's decline, when he pursued David and the latter found a haven by the prophet Shemuel:

And he went there to Nayot in Rama; and the spirit of God came upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Nayot in Rama. And he also stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied before Shemuel, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Shaul also among the prophets? (19:23-24).

This story, which is also rather astonishing, raises a question: What is the true source of the expression, "Is Shaul among the prophets"? Is it to be found in the story in our chapter, or in the story in chap. 19?

We seem to be dealing with not one, but two expressions, and this is the primary significance of the story. In order to understand this, we must first appreciate the significance of the term "*mitnabe*," which appears in both accounts. This term does not necessarily mean that the person achieved prophecy, but that he made efforts and strove for prophecy. Achieving prophecy is not a simple matter; it requires spiritual effort that finds expression in appropriate spiritual preparations.

In our chapter as well, we see some of the efforts made to reach satisfying spirituality; the use of musical instruments before the band of prophets. The connection between music and prophecy appears in other Scriptural contexts, the most famous of them

being the incident involving Elisha: "But now bring me a minstrel, And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him" (II *Melakhim* 3:15). Music brings a person to a certain spiritual state, which is a fundamental component of the ability to achieve prophecy.

However, not every person who tries to achieve prophecy is fit to do so. And thus the situation is created that a person attempts to reach prophecy but fails to do so, and this gives rise to spiritual frustration on the one hand, and desperate attempts to achieve prophecy on the other. For this reason, we occasionally find a blurring between prophets and lunatics.^{8[8]} Many of those who strove for prophecy also engaged in crazy conduct, and therefore it is not always possible to discern the difference between a prophet, and especially a true prophet, and a madman.

Thus, the difference between the first and second stories of Shaul and the prophets finds expression. The first story relates to the beginning of Shaul's career, when the spirit of God fell mightily upon him, and at a certain time he indeed achieved true prophecy. Shaul's ability to achieve prophecy surprised those around him: "What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Shaul also among the prophets?" This deep impression followed from the sudden transformation of an ordinary person into one who is part of a band of prophets and his achievement of prophecy. For this reason, mention is also made of the response of the person who responded to the aforementioned question: "And who is their father?" In other words, even the other prophets did not achieve prophecy by the merits of their forefathers, but rather by way of independent, personal work, and therefore it is no wonder that Shaul achieved it as well.

Chap. 19, on the other hand, finds Shaul in his decline, and in a very difficult emotional state: "Now the spirit of the Lord had departed from Shaul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrified him" (16, 14). In this chapter, Shemuel merely "prophesies," but he does not reach the spirit of God. This tragic "prophesying" leads the king of Israel to difficult consequences: "And he lay down naked all that day and all that night" (19:24). Here the saying "Is Shaul also among the prophets?" does not express admiration, but just the opposite: Is Shaul, king of Israel, counted among those people who engage in frenzied behavior in order to reach prophecy, but fail to achieve it?

^{8[8]} Thus, for example, in the words of the officers to Yehu after he was anointed by one of the sons of the prophets: "Why did this mad fellow come to you" (II *Melakhim* 9:11). And similarly: "The Lord has made you priest in the place of Yehoyada the priest, that there should be officers in the house of the Lord, for every man that is **mad, and acts the prophet**, that you should put him in the stocks, and in the collar" (*Yirmiyahu* 29:26); "Israel shall know it: **the prophet is a fool, the man of spirit is mad**" (*Hoshea* 9:7).

The two sayings, which originated in parallel but opposite situations, describe the entire reversal which passed over Shaul – from the great moments at the beginning of his career until the difficult moments at the end. It seems that these two stories were meant to establish a framework in order to demonstrate Shaul's great fall.^{9[9]}

IV. "BUT CONCERNING THE MATTER OF THE KINGDOM, HE TOLD HIM NOT"

The story of the signs concludes with another short epilogue – Shaul's meeting with his uncle:

And Shaul's uncle said to him and to his servant, Where did you go? And he said, To seek the donkeys; and when we saw that they were not found, we came to Shemuel. And Shaul's uncle said, Tell me, I pray you, what Shemuel said to you. And Shaul said to his uncle, He told us plainly that the donkeys were found. But concerning the matter of the kingdom, whereof Shemuel spoke, he told him not. (14-16)

What is the purpose of this short story? It seems that it comes to teach about Shaul's modesty, which found expression in his not telling his uncle everything that had happened. As Rashi writes: "A streak of modesty was found in him."

There might, however, be another message here, depending on how we understand the words, "whereof Shemuel spoke." They might refer to "the matter of the kingdom" that Shemuel shared with Shaul. But they might also refer back to the words, "he told him not." According to this, the verse means to say that Shaul did not tell his uncle about the matter of the kingdom as he had been instructed by Shemuel. As might be recalled, at the end of chap. 9, I pointed out the secrecy in which Shaul's anointing took place. At this stage, Shemuel wants Shaul's anointing to remain secret, until Shaul will reveal himself to all of Israel. According to this, the dominant characteristic here is not modesty, but absolute fidelity and subordination to Shemuel. Unfortunately, Shaul will not be able to maintain these traits for long.

(Translated by David Strauss)

^{9[9]} It should be added that the two stories are reversed with respect to the direction. In our chapter, Shaul goes from Rama, Shemuel's city, in the direction of Giva; whereas there Shaul goes from Giva to Rama.

